

Violent messages run deep

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Over 11 years as a practicing psychologist, Elmira's Rachel Bryant has observed a clear trend among her younger clients — and she doesn't like it.

"I saw a new population of kids — attractive, bright, good friends, good families, sensitive parents getting them in to me right away. These are kids who shouldn't be in my office, kids whose sensibilities were being assaulted in school," Bryant said during a telephone interview.

Many of their problems are fueled by a toxic cultural environment that they accept as normal, she feels. "So much of what they encounter on a daily basis is angry, negative, harmful," she said, observing that such influences lead to self-cutting, depression, promiscuity and drinking.

For example, she said that children's attire has become increasingly suggestive. "The level of sexual talk and touch, even if they're not a target of it — they hear it all the time. Where's compassion, empathy, kindness?" Bryant added that widespread body piercing is reflective of teens who aren't concerned about the pain involved. "It's almost like the threshold has gotten so high — their senses almost seem to be dulled."

Bryant puts the blame on influences that begin long before a child's high-school years. "Internet, television, movies — there's a very consistent strain of dehumanizing messages. There's no kind of filter, they're just absorbing these images," she said.

She contends that "cartoons and



Photo illustration by Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

video games today are desensitizing because they're using images of real people. There's a difference between Space Invaders and these realistic guys shooting each other with guns." And Bryant likened Victoria's Secret television commercials, which air during daytime hours, to soft-core pornography.

Parents can only be so successful in warding off all these influences, Bryant said. "You'd have to watch your kids in the box," she remarked.

Yet there are ways for parents to combat these negative influences, Bryant said Oct. 8 at St. Mary's Church in Elmira, where she delivered the keynote address for a program "Toddlers to Teens: Tools for Parenting in a Violent World." The workshop was sponsored by the Southern Tier Task Force on Youth and Relationships, in conjunction

with the diocesan Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence office. October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

During her talk at St. Mary's, Bryant offered the following tips:

- Know what information your child is taking in from video games, music, movies and television. Have lots of conversations, without lectures, even if your kid is not in trouble.
- Talk to your kids about these messages and get their opinions. Ask for their reflections on other aspects of their lives, such as what's going on at school.
- Maintain high expectations.
- Choose your battles carefully.
- Talk with other parents.
- Get to know your child's friends.
- Take care of yourself so you can take care of your family.

Family events

• **OCT. 26, 27** — Ghost stories: "Still on Watch — Lighthouse Ghost Stories," Charlotte Gene-see Lighthouse Museum, behind Holy Cross Church, 4492 Lake Ave., Rochester. Sat. 7-9 p.m., Sun. 6-8 p.m. free donations accepted. 585/671-6205

• **SUN. OCT. 27** — Halloween Express: Fall Foliage Express Railroad Excursion, ride in costume, 1 1/2 hr. round trip leaves Ontario Midland Railroad, Rotterdam Rd., 1/2 mi. south of Rt. 104, Sodus. 11:30 a.m. & 2:15 p.m. \$11 adults, \$7 children 3-15. 585/232-1900 or 585/987-1305. www.rochmrs.org

• **NOV. 5, 13** — Days for tots: Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester. Nov. 5, "Sculptures with Bubbles" by Professor Suda, 9:30 & 10:30 a.m. Nov. 13, Thanksgiving program with Crystal and Scooter of Just Clowning Around, 9:30 a.m. \$6 adults, \$5 children under 12 months free. call 585/263-2701, ext. 314

• Take care of your marriage, since it can be the best example of a mature and joyful relationship for your child.

Bryant emphasized that parents must tune into their children's worlds, saying many of her young clients claim their parents "have no idea" what they face each day.

"The stakes are so high and the kids are so confused. The only answer is for people to get it, to understand it, to raise their kids in a much more serious way," said Bryant, who writes a weekly parenting column for the Elmira Star Gazette.

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